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INFO RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE

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SUBJECT: EU ARCTIC POLICY: BRUSSELS LOOKS NORTH

REF: GOURLEY-CATON EMAILS

Classified By: Economic Minister Counselor Peter Chase, reasons: 1.4 B and D

11. (SBU) On February 20, Janos Herman, Policy Advisor and Deputy Political Director, DG External Relations, called on USEU's Economic Section to discuss the policy paper (i.e., communication) "The European Union and the Arctic Region" (issued in November) and the Commission's request for observer status in the Arctic Council. He outlined Europe's historic role in the region, and noted on-going partnerships in the EU's Northern Dimension policy and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). Herman looks forward to meeting the Department's Senior Arctic Official Julia Gourley in Brussels on March 5 on the margins of the Arctic Transform conference and reviewing with her the Commission's reply to the Arctic Council's request for additional information.

THE EU'S ARCTIC INTEREST

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12. (SBU) Herman said "it was only natural" for the European Union to develop an Arctic policy, given its history, economy, geographic location, scientific research, and global environmental concerns such as climate change. The communication is a first step in a "layered approach" that will take some time to complete. He said that partners in the Northern Dimension (Norway, Iceland, and Russia) and BEAC (Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia) had encouraged the Commission to better coordinate its work in the region. In October 2008, in its resolution on Arctic governance, the European Parliament urged the Commission to develop an EU policy. The International Polar Year gave further emphasis, particularly in focusing on research programs.

ARCTIC COUNCIL OBSERVER STATUS

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13. (C) Herman said the Commission's request for observer status in the Arctic Council was directly linked to Parliament's resolution on the Arctic and is only one of many proposals for action included in the communication. Joining the Arctic Council as an observer is also the best way for the Commission to increase international cooperation and has the potential to direct EU funding to programs. According to Herman, EU Member States Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, supported the request -- although Denmark "had been difficult in discussions" -- and Iceland and Norway were also supportive. He anticipated that the "big three" of the United States, Canada, and Russia, would also welcome the Commission's application. He said he was aware of Arctic Council discussions on the increasing numbers of Observers

and had heard that Russia was most concerned. Herman argued, however, that the Commission has much to offer the Arctic Council and "certainly should not be kept out while debates on China and Korea continue." When asked about his trip to Canada, Harman said a delegation had gone to Ottawa to address "public perception and fears" but said there were no issues -- other than the seal hunt -- of government concern.

¶4. (C) Herman said the Commission would respond to the Arctic Council Secretariat's request for additional information by mid-March. The Commission expects to be treated like "any other Observer" and to engage at the Working Group level only. While initially, the Commission will "listen, seek to understand, and find out where it can make the most useful contribution," it is expected that Commission experts will eventually serve on all six working groups: Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP), Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), Emergency Prevention Preparedness and Response (EPPR), Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME), and Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). Herman said that relationships with the Saami and Inuit were good and their special status is well established within the European Community. While the EU's concerns about animal welfare conflicted with aboriginal people hunting seals and whales, Herman said that was being addressed on many levels. When pressed about what topics that truly matter to the Commission, Herman said that navigation was an important issue given Europe's large merchant fleet. On energy, he said that the EU would be a market, but understands that

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coastal states control the actual resources.

¶5. (C) Herman said the relationship between Denmark, an EU member state, and Greenland is complicated. The Commission's response to the Arctic Council would be clear, but somewhat nuanced for political reasons. He expressed bafflement about why the Faroe Islands were under question. On the issue of competence, he said the Commission normally refers legal experts to the EU treaties and cannot enumerate specifics. That said, the Commission will reply to the question and Herman himself is prepared to engage constructively in oral discussions to explain and allay concerns. He added that the major competencies are generally well-understood: foreign policy, environment, transport, trade, fisheries. Herman also said that Arctic Council members should have no fears that somehow granting the Commission observer status would lead to a "European bloc" or some type of collusion among EU member states, EU observer states, and permanent participants and observers with relationships to the Commission. He noted bluntly that if the Commission were to take such a line it would do so in Brussels, outside of the Arctic Council, and observership would make no difference.

A BOOMING CONFERENCE TOPIC

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¶6. (U) Meanwhile, conference organizers in Brussels have a new subject to explore. In September, a Friends of Europe debate on energy security asked "Is the Arctic the Future Frontier?" At a European Policy Centre (EPC) hosted policy dialog "The EU and the Arctic: exploring uncharted territory?" in November, representatives from European Parliament, the Commission, Norway, and Greenland had a robust discussion on governance, whaling, climate change, and the sustainable use of natural resources. EPC followed up in January with another policy briefing, "Flat, cold and (increasingly) crowded: what policies for the Arctic?" where the keynote speaker, Norwegian State Secretary Elisabeth Walaas, described a changing dynamic due to increased human activity and climate change in the region, but underlined that the legal framework to meet challenges was in place. At a Canadian Embassy seminar "The Challenges of the Arctic: Canadian perspectives" in February, presentations by Arctic

Council Permanent Participants -- the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Arctic Athabasca Council and the Gwi'chin International Council -- stressed that the Arctic is not an empty space but an inhabited region, one where native people are the true experts. The European Parliament is holding the Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum February 25-26 and on March 5, the EU-sponsored, NGO-driven Arctic Transform will have its final conference in Brussels.

17. (U) Commission's communication on the Arctic:
ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/

Arctic Council Website: www.arctic-council.org

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